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MAY 9 1952

Dear General: —

I appreciate your sending to me your overall estimate of the world situation and your estimate of the international situation as of March of this year. I read your papers with interest and was gratified to learn that you have been able to proceed to this type of estimative work.

I was impressed by how much the thinking of your group parallels that of our own. Of course, whenever one must arrive at estimates based upon information which is often imprecise and must be projected into the future, and whenever there are imponderables upon which little or no reliable information is available, there will be differences in emphasis and different weights accorded to the various factors considered in arriving at an estimate. In your precise and well-written overall estimate, you perhaps did not take the space to develop some points which I am sure you have considered and which trouble all of us.

For example, you conclude that the USSR probably would not start a war through 1953 because the political development and military production of the Soviet bloc are not sufficiently advanced and because the Soviet leaders believe they can still attain their objectives by cold war tactics. Supposing that the Soviet military development, especially in air defense and in weapons of mass destruction, were more advanced than is believed, might this result in more boldness in pursuing cold war tactics, even to the point of taking such steps that the West might feel obliged to counter them by force? If the West did give indications of countering by force, would the USSR accept a showdown or, as it has done so often in the past, withdraw and pursue its objective by other means? What would be the Soviet reaction if our own capability to prevent Soviet cold war victories proved better than the USSR expected? Would the USSR be prompted to take more reckless action or would it be inclined to retire and await better days?

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You also note that the USSR would itself start a shooting war only if it believed it necessary to forestall an attack from the West or to exploit a decisive weakness of the West. What about the possibility that the Kremlin leaders might choose to attack simply because they saw rearmament measures underway in the West which, if brought to completion, would threaten the security of the USSR and prevent the achievement of its objectives for many years to come? Might the USSR attack the West when those measures reach a point where they can no longer be checked by political means, but have not yet reached a point where to challenge the West would result in a Soviet defeat?

You state that the present world situation is and will be for a long time to come like a powder barrel which could explode from some unforeseen and unintentional spark. The USSR in the past - as with Japan during the late 1930's - has refused to become involved in a war over even big sparks. What reason is there to believe that the USSR would not still refuse to fight a major war unless it believed itself capable of victory (unless, of course, it were subjected to large-scale attack)?

When you have occasion to revise your estimates, I should appreciate receiving any evidence or conclusions you may have on these very difficult questions.

Sincerely

[redacted] 25X1A9a

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Handwritten note added by DCI:
"I am very glad that [redacted] is joining you. He impressed me as a man of character and honor." W.B.S.

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Letter to General [redacted]

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